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Chapter 1
“The Fairer Image”:
Reflections of Narcissus and Pygmalion’s Ivory Maid

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets turn it into something better, or at least something different.

T. S. Eliot, “Philip Massinger,” *The Sacred Wood*

In the central books of *Paradise Lost*, one of Milton’s most pressing concerns was to imagine and make vividly real to his reader the ways of the first man and woman. When fashioning the first woman, Milton turned primarily to Ovid for guidance, but when it came to shaping the events surrounding Eve’s nativity the *Metamorphoses* would seem to have little to offer. In Ovid’s account of mankind’s origins in the *Metamorphoses*, surprisingly “nothing is spoken of the creation of Woman,” as Sandys remarked (58). Whereas Hesiod’s accounts of Pandora’s creation in the *Theogony* (570-612) and *Works and Days* (57-105) are both openly hostile, Ovid omits any mention of this myth with its strongly misogynistic associations.¹ Yet, in spite of this, Eve’s account of her first moments of existence is generally acknowledged to be one of the most unequivocal examples of a specifically Ovidian episode in the poem.² Milton uses the tale of Narcissus’ longing for his reflected image in a pool as a template for this autobiographical episode. Over the past decade, a number of critics have used categories drawn from the influential writings of Lacan³ to structure their discussion of Eve’s “mirror stage”;⁴ my particular purpose in the present chapter is not so much to debate whether or not the imposition of a Lacanian perspective is illuminating, but to demonstrate that Milton’s representation of Eve’s own creation narrative is indisputably Ovidian.

I

The account of Eve's creation in the book of Genesis tends to concision just this side of silence, thereby allowing a poet of Milton's imaginative power the opportunity to wrap flesh around the bare bones of the scriptural account. Observing that it was "not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. II.18), the Lord God:

. . . caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the Flesh instead thereof;

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Gen. II.21-23)

The Biblical account of the creation of "Woman," is teasingly elliptical, leaving much unsaid. Only certain decisive moments are recorded, thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed and invite interpretation. Nevertheless, the vantage point from which we, as readers, are encouraged to observe what takes place is, evidently and unsurprisingly, a male viewpoint. Moreover, we may be so accustomed to the passage as it stands that we may not even stop to consider certain fundamental questions that the narrative fails to answer: *where* was Eve removed to immediately after her creation from Adam, and *why*? What did she *do* before her Creator led her back to Adam? What was *her* response to Adam's proprietorial declaration, "This is now bone of my bone . . . "?

If we turn to Sylvester's rendering "Of the Creation of Woman," these interpretative opportunities are likewise passed over in silence. Indeed, the episode provides a useful measure of Milton's creative re-working of the same authoritative biblical passage. The narrator elaborates on the spare account in Genesis only by enthusing over Eve's "rare beauties" and Adam's enthusiastic reception of his new bride. Like the sculptor Pygmalion who carved out of ivory the likeness of a woman, adorned with such flawless beauty that she surpassed in loveliness any woman born, (*Met.* X.247-49),⁵ God from Adam:

. . . took a rib, which rarely He refin'd,
And thereof made the Mother of Mankind:
Graving so lively on the living bone
All *Adam's* beauties; that, but hardly, one
Could have the Lover from his Love descry'd,
Or known the Bridegroom from his gentle Bride.

(*Du Bartas*, I.vi.1042-47)

Having taken note of their general resemblance, Sylvester takes an almost voyeuristic pleasure in enumerating the particular differences between the first woman and the first man:

. . . she had a more smiling Eye,
A smoother Chin, a Cheek of purer Dye,
A fainter Voyce, a more inticing Face,
A deeper Tress, a more delighting Grace,

And in her Bosom (more then Lillie-white)
Two swelling Mounts of Ivory, panting light.

(*Du Bartas*, I.vi.1048-53)

There is little doubt that Adam is exceedingly well pleased with the result:

No sooner *Adam's* ravisht eyes did glance
On the rare beauties of his new-come Half,
But in his heart be 'gan to leap and laugh,
Kissing her kindly, calling her his Life,
His Loue, His stay, his Rest, his Weal, his Wife,
His other-Selfe, his Help (him to refresh)
Bone of his Bone, Flesh of his very Flesh.

(*Du Bartas* I.vi.1055-61)

From the unequivocally male perspective of the third-person narrative of Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, which we as readers are insistently invited to share, God's latest creation is a figure entirely, if discreetly, defined by her sexual identity. Indeed as the first woman is appraised under the gaze of this connoisseur of feminine beauty she becomes an aesthetic object, a veritable work of art to be looked at and admired -- little more than an ivory statue.⁶ The reifying effect of this blazon only accentuates her silence and the lack of attention given to her response. (It is notable too that this Eve is simply effaced from the account of life in Eden before the Fall and only takes a speaking part for her encounter with Satan.) She seems more like this Adam's "living doll" than his soul mate.

There are obvious iconographic parallels between the creation of Eve from Adam's living bone and Pygmalion's ivory maid⁷ who softens into flesh and comes to life a fully-formed woman, awakened like Sleeping Beauty with a lover's kiss.⁸ The answer to Pygmalion's prayer, she seems the ideal woman and perfect wife, at once compliantly submissive and alluringly erotic: a fantasy figure with an enduring appeal -- the Stepford wives seem cast from the same mould -- whose whole world is her husband. Without a name and without a voice, the former statue may seem as much Pygmalion's possession as the piece of ivory from which she was originally crafted. She has no separate identity apart from Pygmalion to whom -- with the aid of Venus -- she owes her very existence, while her future role, so far as the narrative in the *Metamorphoses* appears concerned, is to bear his child.

However, the text in the *Metamorphoses* does not simply enact the transformation of cold, hard ivory to warm, soft flesh; her successful metamorphosis from lifeless statue to living woman is signalled in the text by the crucial word *sensit* ("she felt," *Met.* X.293), which indicates a significant shift in focus from the sensations experienced by Pygmalion to the dawning consciousness of his newly awakened bride. When she finally opens her eyes and timidly looks up: *pariter cum caelo vidit amantem* ("she saw at once her lover and the sky," *Met.* X.294); as Genevieve Liveley observes: "The look that the statue-turned woman offers back to her creator as she comes to life represents the defining point of her vivification" (207). In that moment, she is promoted from lifelike, but lifeless, aesthetic object to human being, observing the world from her own unique perspective. Although Ovid does not pursue this line of thought himself, his narrative opens up the intriguing speculation: how would it feel to be brought into the world fully-grown, without any experience of life, and to find oneself at once the object of another's passion?

By imaginatively reconstructing Eve's first moments of life and her initial response to Adam from Eve's own viewpoint, Milton embraced this challenge and at the same time undertook to answer the questions posed by the Biblical account of the creation of Eve, exploiting the interpretative possibilities embedded in Genesis. If, after her creation from his rib, she was brought to Adam, then this would suggest a short period of separation while he continued in the deep sleep into which he had fallen. Having Eve wake to life entirely alone allows her to experience a sense of self separate from her relationship to Adam, and thereby encourages the reader to see her as a fully integrated human being, not just in terms of Adam's response to her. The significance of this narrative decision is difficult to exaggerate.

By giving to Eve a voice and allowing her to speak of her own first experience, Milton surprises the reader into a hitherto unimagined viewpoint on an all too familiar story. This freedom of perspective is crucial, and marks the poem as a post-Medieval work. Far from a static frieze, the poem is a huge living space, a Renaissance masterpiece of interlocking, overlapping perspectives, each different, each telling the same tale differently. Eve's telling of her own story from her own point of view, is enough to jolt us out of our accustomed mode of response; it is subtler, but comparable in its breathtaking originality of effect to opening the poem with Satan at his most magnificent, most human and charismatic.

In Sylvester's *Du Bartas* as in Genesis, the question of whether or not Eve will be willing to fulfil the role for which she has been created as a "help meet" for Adam simply does not arise; incompatibility of feeling is not even acknowledged as a possibility. In *Paradise Lost*, however, we do not find a generic type, "Woman," with a capital letter, but rather, as the use of Eve's personal name⁹ throughout implies, an autonomous individual whose acceptance of Adam cannot, unlike the consent of

Pygmalion's nameless bride, be unquestioningly assumed. Milton's Eve has a voice and a will of her own.

This said, Eve's very first words as a speaking character in the epic are entirely self-effacing, and seem to promise complete devotion to Adam at the expense of any personal integrity and personality when she addresses him thus: "O thou for whom / And from whom I was form'd flesh of thy flesh, / And without whom am to no end, my Guide / And Head," answering his words with an echo-like responsiveness, "what thou has said is just and right" (IV.440-43). However, a rather different impression is created as she smoothly and unhesitatingly takes over the initiative in the exchange between them, and begins to rehearse her autobiographical anecdote in a relaxed and assured manner.¹⁰ It is a passage worth quoting in full:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awak't, and found myself repos'd
Under a shade of firs, much wondring where
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issu'd from a Cave, and spread
Into a liquid Plain, then stood unmov'd,
Pure as th' expanse of Heav'n; I thither went
With unexperienc'd thought, and laid me downe
On the green bank, to look into the cleer
Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another Skie.
As I bent down to look, just opposite,
A Shape within the watry gleam appeerd,
Bending to look on me: I started back,

It started back, but pleas'd I soon returnd,
 Pleas'd it returnd as soon with answering looks
 Of sympathie and love; there I had fixt
 Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,
 Had not a voice thus warnd me, What thou seest,
 What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thy self,
 With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
 And I will bring thee where no shadow staies
 Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee
 Whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy
 Inseparablie thine, to him shalt beare
 Multitudes like thy self, and thence be call'd
 Mother of human Race.

(IV.449-75)

Although no explicit comparison is drawn between the two, readers from the earliest editors onwards have recognized here the obvious and open application to Eve's first memories of Ovid's story of Narcissus, and his obsessive love for his own reflection in the water. Milton's strategic deployment of Eve as internal narrator at this point creates a subtle means of re-working the familiar story, filtering the myth through the individual perspective of the speaker. The myth is clearly instrumental in articulating the experience -- unique to Adam and Eve as the first human beings, and to Pygmalion's bride too, of course -- of coming to consciousness as fully-formed adults, of being brought to life without self-knowledge and encountering the world with "unexperienc't thought" (IV.457).

II

Eve comes to life full of wonder, but it is not unfocused amazement; the beginnings of self-awareness are shown by her intellectual curiosity as she immediately concerns herself with a number of pressing questions: “where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how” (IV.451-52). When she recalls speculating about “what” rather than “who” she was, the more experienced Eve, narrating the episode retrospectively, is drawing a distinction between her current state of self-knowledge and her then only emergent consciousness.¹¹ Coming upon her reflection in the water just after her creation, Eve naturally assumes that it is another being; she lacks the experience or guidance which would inform her that the evidence provided by her senses may be misleading, prompting such a mistake.

The confusing testimony of her senses is reinforced by the nature of her surroundings: the reflective properties of the water render sky and lake indistinguishable.¹² The landscape itself seems uncommunicative: the only “voice” to be heard is the “murmuring sound” (IV.453) of water that commands her attention. A number of critics have commented on the “womb-like” nature of this environment in which Eve, as yet speechless, finds it difficult to distinguish between her self and the world outside herself.¹³ Indeed, Milton’s creative adaptation of the story of Narcissus to convey Eve’s first experience was immediately acclaimed as improving upon the original tale in the *Metamorphoses*.

Patrick Hume, who produced the first full commentary on *Paradise Lost* in 1695, was one of the first to defend Milton’s usage of the myth on the grounds that it was, “much more probable that a Person who had never seen any thing like her self,

should be in love with her own faint reflected Resemblance, than that a Man acquainted with the World and himself, should be undone by so dull a dotage” (note to IV.461).¹⁴ Even Sandys seems to have found that Ovid’s myth strained the bounds of credibility for he cites Pausanias’ expostulation: “*But how absurd is it to believe, that any should be so distracted or besotted with affection, as not to distinguish a shadow from a substance?*” and then proceeds to outline Pausanias’ own version of the tale with its strongly rationalistic bias. In this account, Narcissus had fallen in love with his twin sister, “*so exceeding like as hardly distinguishable*”; after her death, Narcissus had “*repaired off*” to a fountain for solace, “*much satisfying his affection in gazing therein, as not beholding his owne shaddow, but the image of his dead sister*” (159). Sandys seems to favour this attempt at a more reasonable explanation of Narcissus’ strange infatuation by closing this section of his commentary with a short disquisition on “the miraculous likenesse of twins” of which “all ages have afforded examples” (160).

The more knowing and insightful Ovid makes imaginative sense of the story. By innovatively coupling the story of Echo with that of Narcissus in a way that brings out the complementary nature of both, he multiplies the possibilities for complex thematic interplay between reflection and echo, sameness and otherness, shadow and substance. As the reflection that Narcissus beholds in the pool has no substance of its own, but is wholly dependent on the youth, so Echo is a separate individual, but her speech is wholly dependent upon what Narcissus says. Juno had deprived Echo of the capacity to initiate conversation, reducing her to only “*vocis . . . brevissimus usus*” (‘ “the briefest use of speech,” ’ *Met.* III.367); the jealous goddess felt this to be a fitting punishment for engaging her *longo . . . sermone* (“in lengthy conversation,”

Met. III.364), when she might have caught Echo's fellow nymphs in their amatory escapades with her philandering husband.

The naturally talkative nymph is frustratingly compelled to wait on others to speak since she can only reproduce their final words; thus her every word is dependent on what is said to her, and she has no true speech of her own. Echo falls in love with the beautiful Narcissus, and begins to stalk him, waiting for an opportunity to overcome her silence and voice her desire. When an opening does arise -- with more than a little help from Ovid -- Echo seizes the opportunity to impress her own meaning upon his words, wresting them from their original purpose into an invitation to love.¹⁵ Separated from his hunting companions, Narcissus calls out loud:

. . . "ecquis adest?" et "adest" responderat Echo.

hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnes,

voce "veni" magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.

respicit et rursus nullo veniente "quid" inquit

"me fugis?" et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.

perstat et alternae deceptus imagine vocis

"huc coeamus" ait, nullique libentius umquam

responsura sono "coeamus" rettulit Echo,

et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva

ibat, ut iniceret sperato bracchia collo.

ille fugit fugiensque "manus complexibus aufer!

ante" ait "emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri."

retullit illa nihil nisi "sit tibi copia nostri."

(*Met.* III.380-92)

. . . “Is anyone here?” and Echo answered “Here!” Amazed he darted his glance in every direction, and he cried out in a loud voice “Come!” She cried out the word again. He looked behind and, again when no one came, said, “Why do you run from me?” And he received back just those words that he had said. He stood still and, cheated by the likeness of an answering voice, he said, “Here, come and join me!” and Echo, never more willing to give her response, answered, “Come and join me!” And she herself furthered her words by running out of the wood to throw her arms around his longed for neck. He bolted, and as he ran off, he shouted, “Keep your hands off me! I’ll die before I yield to you.” And all she answered was “I yield to you.”

While Echo offers herself to Narcissus without reservation, Narcissus is so intent on denying himself to others that he proclaims his determination to die rather than give himself to Echo. After Narcissus has ruthlessly repelled her advances, Echo pines away at being so cruelly rejected. Narcissus’ failure to notice the way Echo’s words exactly mirror his own speech, prepares the reader for his inability to comprehend the phenomenon of his reflection in the pool.¹⁶ Moreover, given that Echo, who reproduces his words so exactly, proves to be a separate individual, Narcissus’ expectation that the image in the pool will prove to be another person seems, in the terms established by the narrative, to be less patently absurd. As we shall see, Echo as well as Narcissus seems to have exercised a shaping influence on Milton’s poem.

III

The selective interplay between the story remembered from Ovid and the present text is at its most brilliant as Narcissus and Eve both gaze at the reflection in the pool. Narcissus' peculiar status of being at once lover and beloved, subject and object of desire, and the blurring of such distinctions, is reinforced by a dazzling sequence of mirroring effects in the hemistichs of these lines and by the way in which, as DuRocher has pointed out: "All the verbs, active and passive, return to 'ipse' (himself)," (90-91):

cunctaque miratur, quibus est mirabilis ipse.

se cupit inprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur,

dumque petit, petitur, pariterque accendit et ardet.

(*Met.* III.424-26)

He gazes in admiration at what makes him the object of an admiring gaze.

Unsuspectingly, he longs for himself and he approves himself just as he is approved, and pursues as he is pursued. And love he kindles as much as with love he burns.

Eve's attraction to the responsiveness of her reflected image, the "answering looks / Of sympathie and love" is suggested syntactically by the mirroring of subject and image along the line of symmetry at the end of two successive verses: "I started back / It started back," and "pleas'd I soon returnd, / Pleas'd it returnd as soon" (IV.462-65). In accordance with the purpose for which she has been created Eve reveals here her nature to give "sympathie and love," but ironically, because of her removal from

Adam's side, such feelings have become deflected away from him; her innately loving disposition is turned upon itself in sterile recursion, echoing itself only.

Narcissus too experiences the illusion of perfect mutuality, and speaks wiser than he is aware of when he observes aloud: "Thou smil'st my smiles: when I a teare let fall, / Thou shedd'st an other; and consent'st in all" (Sandys; *Met.* III.454-55). Drawing false conclusions from the mirror effect, he imagines there to be a sympathetic communion between himself and another, whereas, in fact, every apparent response is self-generated. Unlike Narcissus, Eve does not address the figure she sees in the lake – she has yet to find her voice -- but nevertheless attempts to communicate with her reflection which apparently responds to her sentiments with "*answering looks / Of sympathie and love*" (emphasis added). In withholding her voice at this point, Milton proves a kindlier Juno; Eve's silent self-encounter seems touchingly naive, expressive of her natural warmth and gentleness, where words could so easily have been over-stated and lent themselves to misprision.

There are other notable changes of emphasis in the two accounts. Once again Milton forgoes the opportunity to include a blazon that might objectify Eve in the reader's eyes. Narcissus, on the other hand, transfixed with wonder at the beauty of his own reflection, stands immobilized, looking to the observer just like *e Pario formatum marmore signum* ("a statue sculpted from Parian marble," *Met.* III.419). Smitten with longing, he ironically catalogues his own flawless features in the most hyperbolic terms as he gazes upon

. . . sua limina, sidus

et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines

inpubesque genas et eburnea colla decusque

oris et in niveo mixtum candore ruborem.

(*Met.* III.420-23)

. . . his eyes like stars, and his hair, worthy of Bacchus, worthy of Apollo; his smooth cheeks, his ivory neck, the beauty of his face, the blush mingled with snowy white.

The nature of the response is thus very different in each case: whereas Eve is primarily concerned with seeking a relationship, Narcissus raptly objectifies himself, reducing himself to a catalogue of physical attributes to be admired at a distance. In keeping with his curse to prefer mere image to reality, Narcissus' instinct is always to hold himself at a remove from any real contact.

Milton's readers have reacted in markedly different ways to the mirror scene in *Paradise Lost*: Davies remarks that Eve's "experience of being 'born' into Eden is disquietingly like a bereavement"; she stresses what she feels to be "the loneliness" and "insecurity" of Eve's solitary state that is only relieved by playing games with her own reflection (1983, 9). Other critics have gone to the other extreme in placing a more exalted construction on the mood of the passage, and have been "tempted to view Eve as the attainer of a nirvana-like bliss, and to see in her self-contemplation a childlike beauty, a mysterious form of higher consciousness resembling God's self-contemplation" (316), as Alvin Snider has observed.

Milton seems more at pains to contrast Eve's experience with that of Narcissus. She is startled but delighted to find herself the object of the gaze of another who is, unbeknown to her, herself. However, Narcissus is tormented by the paradox of his situation, the frustration of being so near and yet so far from his beloved:

inopem me copia fecit ("my riches make me poor," *Met.* III.466; ironically fulfilling

his own prophecy when he had rejected Echo's advances: "*ante*" ait "*emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri,*" *Met.* III.391).¹⁷ He feeds his passion with his eyes, and is literally consumed by an insatiable hunger for himself, wasting away until eventually he too is reduced to insubstantiality and becomes a shade in the Underworld, gazing at a shadow of a shadow in a pool.¹⁸ Eve, on the other hand, feels no such sense of incompleteness or lack: she finds her situation entirely absorbing and is delighted by her innocent, because at this point ignorant, flirtation with her reflection in the lake.¹⁹ Eve is only incidentally narcissistic, Narcissus, essentially so.

Caught in a self-enclosed loop, she is, of course, both author and recipient of the looks she desires to find in another. It is only in retrospect that Eve is in a position to recognize the risk of entrapment and acknowledge what would otherwise have been her fate, had a mysterious voice not prompted her to leave the water: "there I had fixt / Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire" (IV.465-66). It is an observation that, as it were, answers Narcissus' rhetorical question of the silent woods that surround him: "*ecquem, cum vestrae tot agantur saecula vitae, / qui sic tabuerit, longo meministis in aevo?*" (" '[Alas, ye woods] Can you remember anyone in all your time so long / That hath so pined away as I?' " *Met.* III.444-45; Golding III.558-59).

Through this deft manoeuvre, it is Narcissus who is made to seem a "type" of Eve rather than the other way round. If we regard Milton as the author of Eve's lines, then the source text from Ovid is obviously temporally anterior; however, if we regard these as the actual words spoken by the first woman on earth, then a chronology emerges in which her experience has temporal priority, and the so-called source text has been cleverly anticipated.²⁰ This is subtle and masterful: Milton, in drawing so deeply from Ovid, also supersedes and displaces the earlier poet, covertly usurping his primacy.

IV

Milton's rendition of the tale diverges more significantly from Ovid's account when the silence is broken by a disembodied warning voice. In the *Metamorphoses*, it is the narrator himself who vainly remonstrates with Narcissus; in *Paradise Lost*, it is the voice of Eve's "Heav'nly Maker" (VIII.485) who effectively breaks the spell of her self-absorption. Narcissus, unlike Eve, cannot, naturally enough, hear the warning voice of his author, who seems impelled to intervene personally on his character's behalf, as he gestures towards saving Narcissus in an ironically futile attempt to avert the catastrophe that must overtake his creation:

*credula, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?
quod petis, est nusquam; quod amas, avertere, perdes.
ista re percussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est:
nil habet ista sui: tecum venitque²¹ manetque,
tecum discedet, si tu discedere possis.*

(*Met.* III.432-36)

O Foole! that striv'st to catch a flying shade!
Thou seek'st what's no-where: Turn aside, 'twill fade.
Thy formes reflection doth thy sight delude:
Which is with nothing of its owne indu'd.
With thee it comes; with thee it staies; and so
'Twould goe away, hadst thou the power to goe.

(Sandys)

Readers have found it difficult to gauge the tone here: is the narrator “taunting” and “condescending” (DuRocher, 89) in his attitude to Narcissus’ predicament, or is he moved by a genuine sense of pity for one who “easily believes too much”?²² Certainly, the omniscient narrator’s elementary lesson in physics does not open up a genuine possibility of escape for Narcissus; rather it knowingly forecasts his helplessness to leave.

How does the divine speaker successfully induce Eve to leave the pool and follow Him? Firstly, He explains the nature of her error in a way that acknowledges both her subjectivity and her beauty as well as at the same time sanctioning her potential for agency and promising the substantiation of her desire:

. . . What thou seest,
What there thou seest fair Creature is thy self,
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow staies
Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces.

(IV.467-71).

Here Adam is imagined as the passive recipient of *her* embraces. However, what follows immediately insists upon her secondary status as Adam’s image: “hee / Whose image thou art” (IV.471-72). Accordingly, Eve discovers herself to be the shadow to Adam’s substance, the copy to his original, and consequently the figure, which she sees in the lake, is but a reflection of a reflection, at least two removes from

this ultimate reality. Froula draws out the apparent implications of this fully: Eve is required to

. . . abandon not merely her image in the pool but her very self -- a self subtly discounted by the explaining “voice,” which *equates* it with the insubstantial image in the pool: “What there thou seest . . . is thyself.” The reflection is not *of* Eve: according to the voice, it *is* Eve. As the voice interprets her to herself, Eve is not a self, a subject, at all; she is rather a substanceless image, a mere “shadow” without object until the voice unites her to Adam – “hee / Whose image thou art” – much as Wendy stitches Peter Pan to his shadow.

(1983, 328)

Nevertheless, it is at this point that the polarity unexpectedly reverses again, as Adam becomes an object of desire that Eve can possess and enjoy: “him thou shall enjoy / Inseparablie thine” (IV.472-73). As well as offering Eve an additional incentive in the form of an annunciation of her more exalted status as “Mother of human Race” (IV.475), her Maker does so in a way that seems to involve her in the primary act of creation by promising that she will multiply her own image in bearing: “Multitudes like *thy self*” (IV.474, my emphasis). Earl hammers the point home: “they are specifically promised as *her* image, not Adam’s, not theirs” (16). As Lewalski has remarked, Eve’s account complicates the reading of her story as the simple submission to patriarchy that some critics have assumed it to be: “As she recounts the words spoken to her by God, she almost concludes that God made Adam for her, not vice versa, and he instituted matriarchy, not patriarchy” (2000, 483). This is not a tangential complexity but one that anticipates a number of future developments.²³

Superficially, Eve as Adam's "image" is less real, less of a person, than her original – she is Adam's echo, but the deeper currents of the poem belie such a facile Platonism. In one sense, Eve as Adam's image may seem secondary, but she is no less herself, no less real for her Maker. The true creator triumphs when his creatures are not merely echoes of his will: Eve is no automaton, but a living being with a soul, a unique, irreplaceable creation.²⁴ That God Himself should courteously persuade her to accept his guidance, rather than simply controlling her actions, like a puppet-master rearranging the pose of one of his figures, argues her irreducible being.

Eve need not share the fate of Narcissus: unlike Ovid's narrator, her instructor can offer an alternative to self-enthrallment – the possibility of loving someone other than herself, a possibility that Narcissus had already rejected. In place of a life of barren self-absorption, her Maker can promise to Eve a tangible presence for an empty shadow, and the means to satisfy her yearning for love with substantial embraces; indeed her reminiscences to Adam will conclude with the first couple both blissfully, "Imparadis't in one anothers arms" (IV.506).

V

It has, of course, been persuasively argued by McColley (1983, 81-82), among others, that the function of Eve's separation from Adam in Milton's account had been to ensure that their marriage is seen to be the result of Eve's own free choice as well as the lonely Adam's desire for a companion. This line of thought is supported by Giovanni Diodati's gloss on the apposite line from Genesis, "And brought her to the man" (Gen. II.22), where, he explains, God acts: "As a mediator, to cause her voluntarily to espouse her self to Adam and to confirm and sanctify that conjunction." Commenting on this "happy ending," Nyquist concludes: "Grounded in illusion,

Eve's desire for an other self is therefore thoroughly appropriated by a patriarchal order, with the result that in *Paradise Lost's* recasting of Ovid's tale of Narcissus, Eve's illusion is not only permitted but destined to pass away" (122). However, if we allow Eve to resume her story, this movement from illusion to reality is not as straightforward as Nyquist suggests.

Eve recalls to Adam how she felt compelled to follow the lead of her invisible guide:

Till I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall,
Under a Platan, yet methought, less faire,
Less winning soft, less amiablie milde,
Then that smooth watry image; back I turnd.

(IV.477-80)

But on first encountering Adam, Eve deliberately turns back to the illusory self-image in the water that she now knows to be herself, just as Narcissus had done: *ad faciem rediit male sanus eandem* ("half distraught, he turned again to the same face", *Met.* III.474), even after his climactic realization that the face he saw there was his own:

"*iste ego sum! sensi; nec me mea fallit imago.*"

(*Met.* III.463)

"That person is me! I felt it; nor does my image deceive me."²⁵

What are we to make of this?

Before attempting to answer this intriguing question, it is perhaps a good point at which to pause and consider the risk Milton took in aligning the newly created Eve with a figure who had become emblematic of pride and vanity.²⁶ According to Golding: “Narcissus is of scornfulness and pride a mirror clear / Where beauty’s fading vanity most plainly may appear” (Epistle of 1567, 105-6). Moreover, narcissistic self-regard is not apparently associated with the human race in general but is found to be paradigmatic of the nature of woman.²⁷ In a deliberately reductive reading, Davies comments on the apparent misogyny that lies behind the linkage:

[Milton] shows Eve as flawed from her inception; scarcely is she out of the metaphorical cradle than she is ogling her own image and making energetic efforts to evade the legitimate embraces of her husband. Eve is thought of as revealing woman’s lack of discrimination (some of her brain-cells are clearly missing from the start), and in terms of the Narcissus motif an emblem of Vanity which will be her downfall. (1983, 4)

While it is worth remembering that in anticipation of the Narcissus episode, Nature herself is pictured holding a “chrystal mirror” (IV.263), Eve does not, unlike Narcissus, use the reflective properties of the water to linger in admiration over her beautiful features, nor, unlike Salmacis -- the Ovidian water nymph whose typical pose is to recline on the grassy margin of her pool, using it as a looking glass to check her appearance²⁸ -- is Eve ever caught paying conscious attention to her beauty or self-consciously considering what look might best become her.²⁹

Until recently, critics tended to be disposed into two main camps: those, like John Peter, who tried to purge the Ovidian overlay of any unwelcome associations entirely, preferring to view Eve’s initial attraction to her reflection as “only one

instance of the many revelations Milton gives of [Eve's] charm and femininity" (102),³⁰ and those, like Bush, who argued that Milton's "preparation for the Fall begins here with Eve's speech" (1964, 160). Those critics that have been concerned to establish a proleptic reading of the episode have focused on the way it provides a "repository of doubt for later exploitation."³¹ They either emphasize the way in which Eve's error in believing her reflection to be another person "foreshadows her later credulity,"³² or, more frequently and damagingly, the way her admiration for her reflection betrays a "faint trace of latent vanity and self-centredness."³³ Both of these branches of the proleptic reading seek to expose weaknesses that are later exploited in full by Satan, the metamorphic fallen angel who is, unbeknown to Eve and Adam, eaves-dropping on this intimate and private audience in the guise of a cormorant.³⁴

Readers are now so familiar with such narrative foreshadowing that other possibilities are too easily left out of account. It should not be forgotten that ever since Ovid's treatment of the myth, the haunting image of Narcissus gazing vainly at his reflection and withering away in fruitless self-absorption, has fascinated writers, artists and, more latterly, analysts alike. Narcissus' inability to go beyond himself is emphatically established in Ovid's version of the story: Narcissus scorns male and female admirers alike and then suffers his strange fate in retributive justice as a punishment for his unyielding pride:

multi illum iuvenes, multae cupiere puellae;

sed (fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma)

nulli illum iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae.

(*Met.* III.353-55)

Many youths and many girls desired him; but in that soft form was a pride so hard that no youths, no girls touched his heart.

These lines demonstrate Ovid's creative use of verbal patterning in which the lines are syntactically arranged to enact the idea they express. The three lines are full of mirroring effects, exercising a proleptic function that prefigures the whole narrative in miniature. The first and last lines are neatly reflected across the middle line of verse which thereby forms the line of symmetry: *iuvenes* and *puellae* are contrasted in the first and last line, while *multi* / *multae* in the first line are negated by *nulli* / *nullae* of the last line. Interposed between these carefully balanced lines is the parenthesis in line 354 which is placed between them to render the frustration of desire (*cupiere* / *tetigere*) by arrogant disdain (*superbia*) and to suggest how, literally and metaphorically, the young men and women cannot get through to the self-enclosed Narcissus. The middle line is itself an example of studied symmetry in which the taut chiasmic arrangement emphasizes the antithesis of *tenera* and *dura*: the promise inherent in Narcissus' soft beauty is negated by his hard and unyielding pride.³⁵

The scene is carefully set by Ovid in a beautifully pointed, ecphrastic set piece:

*fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis,
quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae
contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris
nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus;*

(*Met.* III.407-10)

There was a spring withouten mud as silver clear and still,

Which neither shepherds, nor the goats that fed upon the hill,
Nor other cattle troubled had, nor savage beast had stirred,
Nor branch, nor stick, nor leaf of tree, nor any fowl nor bird.

(Golding III.509-12)

But this *locus amoenus* -- the pleasant place or beauty spot, conventionally the setting for lovers' embraces -- is only deceptively attractive. Except for the silvery brightness of the water, the entire passage is couched in negatives. True, the water is unusually reflective because undisturbed; but there is something a little sinister about the utter lack of life. The pool is virgin territory; like Narcissus himself, it has never been touched. The absence of sunlight and warmth, though refreshing, further correspond to the coldness of the youth. The *locus amoenus* is characteristically "a beautiful, shaded natural site," as E. R. Curtius notes in his classic discussion of this narrative topos (195), but this pool, hemmed about by trees where the sun can barely penetrate, develops an atmosphere of lifelessness and sterility.³⁶ All the visual details coalesce to form a single symbolic expression of Narcissus' own solipsistic enclosure. The remote, untouched and secluded place that benefits neither man nor beast becomes emblematic of the negative quality of Narcissus' own beautiful self-sufficiency: like his statuesque beauty (*Met.* III.419), it lacks warmth and movement. The scene that Eve invites us to view is significantly different:³⁷ the emphasis here falls upon the open aspect of the setting: the water spreads out into a broad expanse or "liquid Plain" (IV.455)³⁸ rather than remaining contained in a pool or pond. The open prospect in *Paradise Lost* adumbrates the way that Eve herself will not ultimately remain self-enclosed.

Nevertheless, Eve caught in the reflection of this Ovidian myth does make an indelible impression, and what follows should surely take part of its significance from

this aspect of the Ovidian connection. If Milton initially used the Ovidian echo to establish Eve's unique state of nescience, the extension of the comparison here, as she returns to the lake in the knowledge that this other Eve is but her own reflection, must encourage the reader to include the association of Narcissus as the archetypal symbol of destructive self-love, who lived a sterile life and involved Echo in his own ruin.

Milton has reversed the sequence of events in Ovid: Narcissus first spurns Echo and all other overtures made to him, then suffers his fate in retributive justice; Eve likewise rejects Adam but after judging him wanting, "*less faire / Less winning soft, less amiable milde*" (IV.478-79, emphases added) than the soft feminine image in the water that she now knows to be herself. As Nyquist has observed, "by means of the Narcissus myth, *Paradise Lost* is able to represent her experiencing a desire equivalent or complementary to the lonely Adam's desire for an 'other self' " (120). However, as Eve appraises Adam's firm contours and muscular form, so unlike the inviting softness of the image in the lake, it is difference that she registers, and she rejects him. Eve may be Adam's "heart's desire" (VIII.451), but he does not, at least according to first impressions, seem to have been hers.

Narcissism, as a psychological or spiritual condition, may be interpreted as excessive self-love, but also as a flawed, damaging identification of self with external appearances. And thus Narcissus, loving his image, wastes away and becomes as nothing. By deliberately prolonging the Narcissus echo, Milton suggests it is not just the first stage of self, to fear the different, the contingent and real, but that it is a continuing temptation, because always easier, more flatteringly seductive, than the challenge of loving another human being with ultimately unknowable intents and needs. So this little glitch in the story has a large significance; it suggests the possibility of a worrying consonance between Narcissus and Eve.

Nevertheless, since after this momentary “homoerotic hesitation,” to use Lewalski’s apt phrase (2000, 483), Eve will, unlike Narcissus, find fulfilment and love, it cannot be altogether denied that the point of the association between the two figures is the contrast rather than the comparison of the final outcome in each case. In spite of this, Eve’s instinctive preference for her own image here is to have a significant bearing on future events, as we shall see. Before we explore this further it will be worthwhile to pursue the complex of parallels and contrasts that Milton strategically deploys to invite comparison between the two autobiographical narratives recounted by Eve and Adam respectively.³⁹

VI

With Eve occupied elsewhere, Adam attempts to prolong the visit of their angelic guest by offering an account of his own first moments of consciousness. The creation of Eve and their first meeting are this time focalized through Adam’s own distinct perspective. Adam comes to life and looks up directly towards the heavens. He stands upright and, without a reflective surface to hand, surveys his body in parts, “Limb by Limb” (VIII.267). Physically active by nature, he flexes his muscles and, endowed with an immediate sense of selfhood though not identity, he is conscious of being separate and distinct from his surroundings: “But who I was, or where, or from what cause, / Knew not” (VIII.270-71). Unlike Eve, Adam instinctively speaks aloud, reasoning that he has been brought to life by some “power præeminent” (VIII.279). He addresses the world in his quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of this “great Maker” (VIII.278): but “answer none return’d” (VIII.285). The uncommunicative

landscape that doesn't even offer an echo in reply intimates Adam's growing sense of lonely isolation.

This is reinforced during Adam's first direct encounter with his creator. While all kinds of living creatures process in pairs before him to acknowledge their fealty, Adam experiences an increasingly keen sense of lack: "but in these / I found not what me thought I wanted still" (VIII.354-55).⁴⁰ Adam's most intense experience is of insufficiency; in comparison with his maker, he remarks upon his own "single imperfection" (VIII.423), recognizing himself to be "In unitie defective" (VIII.425).⁴¹ Unlike Eve, Adam finds the weight of his solitude oppressive: "In solitude / What happiness, who can enjoy alone, / Or all enjoying, what contentment find?" (VIII.364-66).

A number of significant details in these two accounts evidently serve to reinforce the ontological hierarchy of male and female deemed so crucial to Milton's purposes: Adam regards the heavens directly not mediated through a watery reflection; speech and an upright posture seem more naturally his; he is privileged to see the "shape Divine" of his maker (VIII.295), whereas Eve hears only a disembodied voice. However, at the same time, as Lewalski points out: "Adam's narrative (8.355-99), by contrast [with Eve's], testifies to a psychological and emotional neediness that in some ways undercuts gender hierarchy" (2000, 483).

Recent criticism has drawn attention to the potential for narcissism in Adam's attitude to Eve.⁴² Since God had promised Adam that he would find in Eve his "likeness" and his "other self" (VIII.450), Adam understandably tries to claim her as: "Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, *my Self* / Before me" (VIII.495-96, emphasis added). While primarily designed to suggest the special quality of their union, the terms used by God to describe Adam's prospective consort,⁴³ help to condition

Adam's response to Eve and blur the boundaries between self and other. Unlike Eve, who sees herself in the lake before encountering Adam, he has had no comparable specular experience of his own body, which he has only been able to apprehend piecemeal; the nearest he comes to a complete reflection of himself is Eve: "I now see / . . . my Self / Before me" (VIII.494-96). However, as Champagne has noted: Eve is "not just a mirror image for Adam as the 'shape' she sees in the water is for her, but a complement, completing him"; it is this "sense of oneness Adam feels with Eve [that] makes him feel whole, complete" (52, 53). Looking ahead, we can see how this leads Adam to misinterpret the nature of the connection between them to the point of claiming total possession of his "other half" (IV.488) so that, once Eve has fallen, he can see no alternative but to fall with her:

So forcible within my heart I feel
The Bond of Nature draw me to my owne,
My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
Our state cannot be severd, we are one,
One Flesh; to loose thee were to loose my self.

(IX.955-59)

Adam not only recognizes in Eve sameness but difference too, of course.⁴⁴ His first impression is that she is, "Manlike, but different Sex," and this difference is crucially significant too: she is "so lovly faire, / That what seemd fair in all the World" now seemed "summd up" in her (VIII.472-74). In response to Adam's request for a companion, God had assured him that He would provide: "Thy wish exactly to thy hearts desire" (VIII. 451). The wording of God's promise suggests Eve is created

as the embodiment of Adam's innermost desires just as Pygmalion and the ivory maid is likewise a story of wish fulfilment⁴⁵ wherein Venus understood (*sensit*, *Met.* X.277) the true meaning of the sculptor's prayer when he had asked for the living likeness of his statue. Indeed, it is Adam's version of Eve's creation that bears marked affinities with this tale from the *Metamorphoses*.

VII

The skill of the Ovidian artificer is certainly wondrous, enabling Pygmalion to realize fully his "fore-conceit"⁴⁶ of the ideal woman. But though convincingly lifelike, it is a lifeless object; Pygmalion's powers are limited and it is only through divine agency that his prayers are answered and the statue comes to life. Raphael's account of the creation of the first man is sparing of detail: Adam is made from "Dust of the ground" (VII.525); in contrast, Adam's own account of Eve's creation emphasizes the "hands on" approach of the divine craftsman as with loving care the living bone of Adam's rib is "formd and fashond with his hands" till "Under his forming hands a Creature grew" (VIII.469-70).

The ivory statue is entirely the product of art and has a beauty beyond nature: yet paradoxically Pygmalion's artistry conceals itself in the verisimilitude of his creation (*ars adeo latet arte sua*, *Met.* X.252). Eve too is endowed with an ideal beauty transcending nature and art: fashioned by God's own hands she is adorned with a "perfet beauty" (IV.635) such that no woman born has since enjoyed: Eve is "the fairest of her Daughters" (IV.324). Divine art is, paradoxically, perfectly natural and needs no enhancement from artificial ornamentation of any kind as the text continually reminds us when trying to encapsulate the transcendent beauty of Eve's

unclothed form: “Undeckt, save with her self” she is “more lovely fair” (V.380) than any mythological beauty; “in naked beauty” she is nevertheless “more adorn’d” (IV.713) than her descendants who will cultivate the use of cosmetics or surgical enhancement to improve upon nature.

A little later, after recalling to Raphael how he had acclaimed Eve as the “fairest” of all his Creator’s gifts (VIII.493), Adam, in a less expansive and more critically reflective mood, shows himself troubled by how he should act upon the differences between himself and Eve. Although he acknowledges “in the prime end / Of Nature her th’inferiour” (VIII.540-41), “resembling less / His Image who made both” (VIII.543-44), he is still clearly uneasy that, compared with himself, Eve seems the product of too much artistry, feeling that on her had been “bestow’d / Too much of Ornament, in outward shew / Elaborate” (VIII.537-39). John Simons’ reading of the mirror motif would consign Eve to insignificance without Adam: “The woman reflects the self of the man – not her own self. As the mirror waits, signifying nothing till it is filled by our presence, so the woman waits, drained of meaning till she is filled by the signifying presence of the man” (216). However, rather than seeing in Eve the inferior copy of a copy, Adam finds persuasive reasons for viewing her as a perfected version of himself: “As one intended first, not after made / Occasionally” (VIII.555-56), the “last and best / Of all God’s works” (IX.896-97).⁴⁷ By addressing Eve as “Best image of my self” (V. 95), Adam declares her superiority rather than her inferiority to him. Reflecting upon her “loveliness” leads Adam to confess the way Eve’s beauty interferes with his judgement and complicates his attitude to her: “so absolute she seems / And in her self compleat” (VIII.547-48).⁴⁸

Significantly, in his highly selective recollection to Raphael of Eve’s creation and his attempts to woo her, Adam misreads her reason for turning back towards the

lake. He explains her hesitation not as she herself had done to him, but by projecting onto her an assurance of self-worth. That Eve remains silent in both accounts allows for such divergent readings of the motives for her action. Assuming that Eve's desire for him must be equivalent to his for her, Adam attributes her turning away from him, not to any instinctive aversion or sense of incompatibility on her part, but to "Her vertue and the conscience of her worth" (VIII.502). Having both world enough and time, Eve would, he feels, naturally expect him to acknowledge her value and court her accordingly: she "would be woo'd, and not unsought be won" (VIII.503).

Adam cannot reconcile Eve's apparent self-sufficiency, with Raphael's assurances of his superiority; reason is so disorientated by emotion in Eve's presence that

. . . what she wills to do or say,

Seems wisest, vertuousest, discreetest, best;

All higher knowledge in her presence falls

Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her

Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes.

(VIII.549-553; emphasis added)

These lines point to the source of the challenge that Milton's Adam faces in his marriage to Eve. Eve may be Adam's image but she is not simply a shadowy reflection; she is a complete person, an autonomous subject. Once his rib has been fashioned into a separate individual, Adam experiences both the pleasures of marital harmony and the tension of their twoness. Adam may take delight in "all her words and actions mixt with Love / And sweet compliance," which declare "unfeign'd / Union of Mind, or in us both one Soule" (VIII.602-4), but, as Halley points out, "by

the time he says these lines,” Adam has come to realize that “the living harmony of married action depends on Eve’s ‘sweet compliance,’ on her derivation of her will from his” (247)⁴⁹ Milton takes pains to avoid the impression that Adam’s relationship to Eve is the psychological equivalent of marrying the ivory statue. Milton himself was acutely concerned that:

. . . the bashfull muteness of a virgin may oft-times hide all the unliveliness and naturall sloth which is really unfit for conversation. . . . When as the sober man honouring the appearance of modesty, and hoping well of every social vertue under that veile, may easily chance to meet, if not with a body impenetrable, yet often with a minde to another conversation inaccessible.

(Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, I.3; Col. 3.i.394-95)

Elsewhere in the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* Milton had maintained that: “a meet and happy conversation” to be “the chiefest and noblest end of marriage” (I.2; *Col. 3.ii.391*), and in the interchanges between Adam and Eve he demonstrates that to achieve true reciprocity in dialogue, the “fit conversing soul” (I.4; *Col. 3.ii.397*) combines resourcefulness in initiating discussion as well as responsiveness to speech.⁵⁰

Although Zimmerman has claimed that: “Robbed of a personal voice, Eve is coerced into becoming an echo for Adam. (It is not until Book IX that Eve, no longer responding to or being an echo of Adam’s discourse, successfully initiates a discussion.)” (250), Lewalski has effectively corrected such a partial perspective by observing how: “Both before and after the Fall Eve often proposes issues for discussion, initiates action, and leads in some new direction”, noting that, “When their

dialogic interchanges are working properly, Adam, responds to, develops and where necessary corrects Eve's initiatives" (2000, 482). As DuRocher perceptively concludes, "In the context of Ovid's myth," Milton shows "Eve not only as a corrected Narcissus able to escape self-enclosure but also as a perfected Echo able to initiate as well as respond to discourse" (86). Without the gift and risk of free will, and of psychological as well as physical separation from her "author" Adam, God's ultimate creation would be flawed, Pygmalion's statue granted living flesh but no real life at all; Milton's Eve speaks with her own voice, expressive of her own thoughts and desires.

While conducting a monologue might be safer, less demanding and easier to manage for Adam, it would be sterile and unproductive. But if the fruitful dynamics of dialogue are preferable to talking at a mirror, they are not without difficulty for Adam. Even before the Fall, Adam is a little unsure of Eve. To some extent, he sees her as *his* image, an enthralled possession like Pygmalion's statue, but he is also daunted by the image she presents to him of self-possession and beauty. Superficially the opposite of possessive diminishment, this awe is likewise a displaced narcissism, an inability to really see beyond the surface, as Raphael perceives it: "what admir'st thou, what transports thee so / An outside?" (VIII.567-8). This is not to say that Adam has absolutely no sense of Eve's real self, rather that he experiences the uncertainty we all face, of not knowing another as immediately as ourselves. His propensity to defer to her beauty and to place her on a pedestal, although it is only a tendency, still incurs Raphael's displeasure.

The ordinarily affable angel insists that Adam's difficulties are grounded in an illusion -- an over-valuing of the significance of Eve's beauty and an under-valuing of

his own worth. For Raphael the situation is simple and clear cut, the solution self-evident: Adam need only act by a proper self-knowledge. He thus cautions against:

. . . attributing overmuch to things
Less excellent, as thou thy self perceav'st.
For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,
An outside? fair no doubt, and worthy well
Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,
Not thy subjection

and exhorts Adam to

. . . weigh her with thy self;
Then value: Oft times nothing profits more
Then self esteem, grounded on just and right
Well manag'd; of that skill the more thou know'st,
The more she will acknowledge thee her Head,
And to realities yield all her shows.

(VIII.565-75)

Adam has to recognize that God has not created in Eve either a mere plaything or an unattainable goddess. Adam must know Eve and not just her surface; to do so he must also know himself: his tendency to idolize Eve⁵¹ prevents proper self-knowledge. It is with this crucial lack of self-knowledge that the Son will reproach Adam, and to which He will directly attribute the Fall (X.145-57).

VIII

Self-knowledge, and the lack thereof, is, of course, a thematic motif central to the story of Narcissus. In an ironic reversal of the famous injunction of the Delphic oracle, *nosce teipsum* or “know thyself,” Tiresias had cryptically prophesied a long life for the youth, “*si se non noverit*” (“so that himself he do not know,” *Met.* III.348; Golding, III.433). Attributing the cause of Narcissus’ downfall to his exceptional physical beauty, this oracular utterance was glossed by the author of the *Narrationes*⁵² as: *Si pulchritudinis suae nullam habuisset notitiam* (“If only the boy had no notion of his own beauty”). But, once he sees and admires “his shadow in the fountaine,” Narcissus is caught by the beauty of appearances, “that is [he] admireth bodily beauty, fraile and like the fluent water,” as Sandys puts it (160). Narcissus is here perceived as moving in the opposite direction to the Platonic lover who is led from body to soul and thence upward to God. Narcissus on the other hand remains “ensnared by the world of appearances and the beauty of the body, mistaking this for true beauty”.⁵³ Thus Plotinus had alluded to the myth, albeit rather casually, when he exhorted:

Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before. When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image. For if a man runs to the image and wants to seize it as if it was the reality (like a beautiful reflection playing on the water, which some story somewhere, I think, said riddlingly a man wanted to catch and sank down into the stream

and disappeared) then this man who clings to beautiful bodies and will not let them go, will, like the man in the story, but in soul, not in body, sink down into the dark depths . . . consorting with shadows there and here.

(*Enneads* I.vi.8)

As a result, in Sandys' words, Narcissus "ignorantly affecting one thing, pursues another; nor can ever satisfy his longings" (160).

Eve is, of course, contrasted with Narcissus on this point: she learns to delight in likeness with difference rather than simply likeness. Eve herself draws the moral from the story as she professes to have learnt to value other qualities beyond mere physical appearance "and from that time see / How beauty is excelld by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair" (IV.489-91). Since Eve is at a further remove from the divine image than Adam, "resembling less / His image who made both" (VIII.543-44), his "is the likeness in which she may best read the lineaments of deity" (Gregerson, 160) – "God in him" (IV.299). James suggests that Milton has invoked the story of Narcissus not only "to prefigure the Fall" but also "because he finds redemptive possibilities in the tale" (132), while Davies draws out more fully the implications of Milton's revision of the Ovidian myth: "Looking at Adam, [Eve] is performing the role of a higher visionary Narcissus, one who looks upward for a refined reflection of himself rather than downward into the distorting mirror of his senses" (1983, 14).⁵⁴

Adam, on the other hand, seems unable to heed the angel's warning and finds it difficult to live by the knowledge that it is "the mind / And inward Faculties, which most excell" (VIII.541-42). Like Narcissus, Adam finds life apart from his image

unthinkable. His despairing reaction to her temporary removal from his side immediately after her creation proves symptomatic:

Shee disappeerd, and left me dark, I wak'd
To find her, or for ever to deplore
Her loss, and other pleasures all abjure.

(VIII.478-80)

It again adumbrates his inability to contemplate any alternative course of action other than to die with her after her fall (IX.906-10).⁵⁵

IX

Eve's account of her experiences by the lake is a narrative hinge that not only looks forward to Adam's account of his own and Eve's creation in Book VIII, but also backward to Book II. For our reading of Milton's use of the Narcissus myth in Book IV is further complicated because it is not the first time in the narrative that the fable is evoked; its meaning is thus at least partly generated by internal associative links as well as through its application outside of the poem.⁵⁶ Eve is not the only female character to recount her first memories of life to her "author". A network of comparisons and contrasts is articulated between Eve's first moments of consciousness and Sin's account of her own creation. It is a passage that merits close consideration. Sin recounts how

. . . on the left side op'ning wide,

Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
 Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
 Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seisd
 All th' Host of Heav'n; back they recoild affraid
 At first, and call'd me *Sin*, and for a Sign
 Portentous held me; but familiar grown,
 I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won
 The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft
 Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing
 Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st
 With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd
 A growing burden.

(II.755-67)

The similarities are obvious enough: both emerge from the left side; both reflect their author's image and seem "heav'nly fair"; both possess winningly "attractive graces" and unite sexually with the being from whom they were created. (In fullness of time, both too will succumb to a persuasive speech by Satan and disobey God's express command: Sin by opening the gates of Hell, Eve by eating the forbidden fruit.) The differences, however, are at least as telling. Firstly, the impress of her own viewpoint shapes Eve's account; from the outset she establishes her subjectivity: "That day *I* oft remember . . ." (IV.449, emphasis added). Sin on the other hand is trying to jog the memory of a forgetful sire and lover. She gives her account at one remove from direct experience, supplying more information than she could conceivably be a party to. This is emphasized by the formal architecture of the verse: the way in which, in a

single, unbroken verse-period, the first personal pronoun is withheld for ten lines or so until the penultimate word in the passage that follows:

. . . at th' Assembly, and in sight
Of all the Seraphim with thee combin'd
In bold conspiracy against Heav'n's King,
All on a sudden miserable pain
Surpris'd thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzie swumm
In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast
Threw forth, till on the left side op'ning wide,
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
Out of thy head I sprung.

(II.749-58)

Eve is brought to “birth” painlessly from Adam’s side, while Satan is racked by pain at Sin’s sudden delivery. Though Eve is startled by the appearance of her reflection and “started back”, it is still a pleasant surprise; the unexpected emergence of Sin on the more public occasion of her parthenogenesis, on the other hand, at first causes deep consternation and alarm among the spectators: “back they recoild affraid”. It is even strongly intimated that Satan was himself the one most appalled that his mind had forged his sinful thought into a separate reality: in time, Sin finds acceptance and, “familiar grown,” won over even “The most averse,” Satan himself, “thee chiefly”.

Sin is a natural in the art of pleasing, but unlike Eve, she experiences no individual will nor acknowledges any separate desire. She shows no initiative but exists in Echo-like responsiveness. Like Narcissus, who was, as Sandys put it, “strangely intoxicated with selfe admiration” (160), the emphasis in Sin’s account falls entirely upon the narcissistic nature of Satan’s enjoyment of her. There is no suggestion of mutuality nor is there any evidence of interest in her as a separate individual with her own desires. Like the first Woman in Genesis and in *Du Bartas* or Pygmalion’s ivory maid, Sin’s own feelings aren’t consulted, and she doesn’t even expect them to be. Ironically, Satan, even more than Narcissus -- who at least sought for some signs of reciprocity in his illusory “relationship” with another -- comes to exemplify how love which focuses exclusively on the feelings of the lover is nothing other than self-love. Like Pygmalion’s infatuation with his own creation (*operisque sui concepit amorem*, *Met.* X.249), Satan demonstrates the self-absorption of the artist in love with an extension of his own thought.⁵⁷ Although Pygmalion escapes the narcissistic implications of his fate through the miraculous intervention of Venus, it is no accident that Myrrha, his granddaughter, conceives an incestuous love for her own father (*Met.* X.298-471). The narcissistic element in their incestuously abusive relationship is even explicitly recognized by Sin. Like the ill-omened sexual relations between Myrrha and Cinyras, the true nature of the relationship between Satan and Sin isn’t openly acknowledged but furtively consummated, while the product of this shameful inbreeding will, of course, be Death itself.

It is only after the Fall that Adam similarly objectifies Eve and looks upon her simply as the means of gratifying his sexual desires: “For never did thy Beautie since the day / I saw thee first and wedded thee . . . / . . . so enflame my sense / With ardor to *enjoy thee*” (IX.1030-33; emphasis added). Milton’s use of the myth of Narcissus

in Sin's narrative of her creation thus helps to throw light on the especial qualities of pre and postlapsarian sexuality as well as emphasizing the way in which Eve is figured not only as the image of Adam but as an autonomous individual.

Paradise Lost in its larger movement is a narrative of the expected, but there are smaller currents and cross-currents of the unexpected. Demetrakopoulos' remark that "Eve is never pictured as anything other than rather obligingly accepting Adam's advances" (102) conveniently skips over Eve's own account of her initial rejection of Adam's approaches, just as later Adam himself seems to offer a significantly edited version of their first meeting to Raphael, in which any memory of her active resistance or any possibility of a conflict of wills has been effectively suppressed. Demetrakopoulos' comment provides an accurate image of Sin's response to Satan, but as a summary of Eve's more complex relationship with Adam, it is evidently an over-simplification. The chronological priority given to Eve's account of their first encounter is significant: not only does it give narrative weight and emphasis to Eve's own experience, but, by allowing Eve to speak first, her version of events is not made to seem merely a faint or distorted echo of Adam's.

As Eve deliberately turns from Adam back to the image of herself in the lake, Milton forces a revision in the reader's expectations: we do not find the idyllic harmony of wills that one would have thought must monotonously define paradisaal relationships. The narrative falters on the brink of crisis as Adam is manoeuvred into the position of Echo, unable to offer a powerful enough alternative to distract Narcissus from the attractions of his lovely image. Ironically, of course, Adam was not made to be an echo of Eve; on the contrary, Eve was created to be the image of Adam. The sense of dislocation, while significant in itself, is only momentary, however; Adam swiftly asserts himself and throws off the passive role of Echo that

seems to have been temporarily foisted upon him, as the scene of Narcissus gazing enamoured at his own reflection almost imperceptibly transforms itself into one of Apollo's ardent pursuit of Daphne.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

¹ In contrast, Pyrrha, the first woman to appear in Ovid's epic, is an exemplary figure, devout and devoted to her husband (*Met.* I.318-415). (See Chapter 7 for a discussion of Pyrrha's part in Milton's epic.)

² As Anderson has pointed out: "We possess no other extended narration about Narcissus, and, although some people argue that much of Ovid's achievement should be credited to a lost Hellenistic source, there is no evidence whatsoever for such material" (372).

³ See Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," 1-7.

⁴ Most notably: Claudia M. Champagne, 48-59; Richard Corum, 132-33; James Earl, 13-16; Gregerson, 158-60; Marshall Grossman, 150; Roberta Martin, 57-79; Shari A. Zimmerman, 247-67. Lewalski helpfully summarizes the way that Eve's story can be seen as presenting, "a classic Lacanian mirror scene: initial symbiosis with maternal earth and water in a place of pleasure before language, then a rupture when God's voice (the Law of the Father) intervenes, leading her to a husband and thereby into language and culture" (2000, 483).

⁵ This story existed in antiquity before Ovid's version of the narrative, but as a rather sordid affair of a King of Cyprus who tried to have sexual intercourse with a statue of Venus.

⁶ Alison R. Sharrock describes this process of objectification in the opening remarks to her article on Ovid's version of the Pygmalion myth: "Women are 'perceived'. We speak often not just of 'women', but of 'images', 'representations', 'reflections' of women. Woman perceived is woman as art-object; and paradigmatic of this phenomenon is the myth of Pygmalion" (1991, 36).

⁷ Both are thus modelled from related materials. It is important to appreciate the exceptional nature of Pygmalion's creation: not only was the statue made from ivory rather than Parian marble, but the *whole* piece is of ivory. Elaine Fantham draws attention to the significance of this point by observing that: "Historically, ivory would be used only as an overlay for the exposed flesh of a life-size statue" (60).

⁸ While Ovid omits the myth of Pandora, the aetiological creation myth that blames woman for all the miseries of human life, the story of Pygmalion's ivory statue coming to life is embedded in a misogynistic context since her creation is expressly prompted by the sculptor's revulsion at the number of vices women have by nature (*offensus vitiis, quae plurima menti / femineae natura dedit*, *Met.* X.244-45).

However, it should be noted that the narrator at this point is not Ovid but Orpheus: the latter's attitude to women is soured as a result of his guilt at having failed Eurydice. (See Chapter 6 for further discussion of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.)

⁹ It should be stressed that this goes directly contrary to tradition; according to the commentators, who laid great stress upon this point, the name "Eve" was given by Adam to his wife only *after* the Fall; "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. III.20). Newton is clearly alluding to this traditional view when he remarks that, before the Fall, Eve is only so called "by way of anticipation" since until that point she had simply been called "Woman, because she was taken out of . . . man".

¹⁰ It is worth comparing the effect of IV.635-56. In reply to Adam's injunction to rest, Eve's woodenly didactic response, "My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst / Unargu'd I obey . . ." (635-36) unexpectedly modulates into the exquisitely lyrical inset poem: "With thee conversing I forget all time . . ." (639-56). This "echoing song of love" is, as has Martz pointed out, "a remarkable show-piece that concentrates in

sixteen lines certain techniques of repetition and reversal that are reminiscent of the Ovidian style” (220-21).

¹¹ Eve’s subjectivity is partly a linguistic effect: although describing an episode in which her silence throughout is notable, Eve uses “I” thirteen times and “we” (referring to Adam and herself) only once. In Adam’s first speech of the epic, which is mainly concerned with their continuing happiness in the Garden, the delights of mutuality are emphasized: Adam makes no use of the first person singular, but refers throughout to Eve and himself as a unit (“us”), the recipients of God’s bounty.

Deirdre Keenan McChrystal has charted how: “Eve’s use of self-referential pronouns shows a process of self-construction before the Fall” (497).

¹² Ricks helpfully points out how the effect of “indistinguishable commingling” is achieved “not only by the explicit comparisons, but also by the syntactical mingling in a ‘sound . . . spread into a liquid Plain’ ”, 101. See too, Martin, 69 and Zimmerman, 248-49.

¹³ Most notably, Norford refers to an “oceanic womb-like state in which one does not distinguish between self and the world” (1978), 12; see too, Martin, 69.

¹⁴ Following Hume’s lead, Newton, in his note on the passage, adjudged it: “much more probable and natural, as well more delicate and beautiful, than the famous story of Narcissus in Ovid from which our author manifestly took the hint”.

¹⁵ Consider, for instance, *coeamus* in line 386 where Ovid exploits the potential ambiguity in *coire* (to get together). Narcissus suggests they “get together” to become better acquainted, but Echo wants to “get together” by joining with him in sexual intercourse.

¹⁶ As Fantham has pointed out, the expression, *imago vocis* (cf *Met.* III.385) “denotes an echo or aural reflection” just as *imago* is used of “a reflection or visual echo” (45).

¹⁷ The verbal play is difficult to reproduce in an English translation: *copia* ranges in meaning from “abundance” and “riches” to “give access to” or “power over” someone or something.

¹⁸ As Kenneth J. Knoespel points out, the imagery of wax exposed to heat, or frost to the sun shows that Narcissus is “quite literally being consumed” or is “melting away” (1985), 17. Milton seems to recycle this idea to a certain extent when, with the onset of sleep for the first time, Adam imagines that he might pass out of existence “forthwith to dissolve” (VIII.291).

¹⁹ Compare William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, 39-40.

²⁰ In any event, there is a deep irony here in that Narcissus is oblivious to the fate of the lovelorn Echo who has wasted away on his account (*Met.* III.395-401): Ovid’s reader might not be as forgetful as the self-centred and egotistical Narcissus.

²¹ Heather James claims that Eve’s “image *came* and is about to go, unlike Narcissus’s” (133); however, Ovid’s use of *venit* here is *not* a present tense, though it may be more naturally translated by one (“comes,” as in the translation supplied from Sandys). Martindale also makes a valuable observation about the sequence of tenses in Milton and Ovid: “the slight awkwardness in the tenses of ‘With thee it came and goes’ (469), which gives the words a curious Miltonic power, is due to exact imitation of the tenses of the Ovidian original (434-6) . . . Milton is perhaps tacitly correcting, with a kind of passionate pedantry not untypical of him, the translation of Sandys which renders *vēnit* by a present tense” (1985), 167.

²² Regius responds to the passage in this way, glossing *credulus* thus, rather than as “fool” in his commentary on the passage (Moss, 55).

²³ Chapters 4, 5 and 7, in particular, examine the way the actual distribution of power in the relationship complicates and qualifies, if not challenges and subverts, any single authorised version of male superiority and female inferiority.

²⁴ Only after she has fallen does Eve fear that she may be expendable and easily replaced by “another *Eve*” (IX.827).

²⁵ I am grateful to Richard DuRocher for pointing out to me how *nec me . . . fallit* is more convoluted syntactically and emotionally guarded than the simple acknowledgement, “I know.”

²⁶ As John R. Knott’s has observed: “It is a rare critic who does not touch on the narcissism of Eve’s fascination with her image in the lake” (1971, 109). However, the moral customarily extracted from this myth only converges with Eve when Satan either instils narcissistic desires in her or arouses narcissistic longings latent within her. For further discussion of these competing possibilities, see Chapter 4.

²⁷ Clement of Alexandria made the connection, but directed his attack specifically against the application of make-up. He inveighed against those who “turn their faces into masks,” having “invented mirrors for this artificial shape of theirs, as if it were some excellent work or masterpiece . . . For as the Greek fable has it, it was not a fortunate thing for the beautiful Narcissus to have been the beholder of his own image” (*The Instructor* III. 2, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* IV. 280-81).

²⁸ See *Met.* IV.308-12; contrast Daphne seen through the eyes of Phoebus Apollo in *Met.* I.497-502. The chaste nymph has a simple, natural beauty – she is characteristically neglectful of her appearance, allowing her hair to blow loose in the breeze.

²⁹ It is only after eating the fruit that Eve self-consciously constructs herself, “But to *Adam* in what sort / Shall I appeer?” (IX.816-17).

³⁰ Majorie Hope Nicolson too insists that, “It seems entirely possible to explain Eve’s supposed ‘narcissism’ by saying that Eve was still an infant – just now created – and her experience was that of any child for the first time noticing its reflection in mirror or water” (242).

³¹ Giamatti, 316. Similarly, Millicent Bell remarks: “we have glimpsed a dainty vanity in ‘our general Mother’ which the Serpent will put to use” (871).

³² Maurice Kelley, 150, and, more recently, King-Kok Cheung, 202.

³³ Bush (1961), 638. Arnold Stein notes ominously how Eve’s “first recorded act is one that flirts with self-love” (92-93), while Douglas A. Day goes further to suggest that Eve is flawed from the outset by unequivocally asserting that Eve reveals an “innate vanity and resistance to teaching” here (378). More recently, Beverley McCabe has claimed: “Eve’s vanity is not a compatible behaviour with the prelapsarian world,” 73. Such a position is reminiscent of E. M. W. Tillyard’s claim that Adam and Eve are “virtually fallen before the official temptation has begun” (1951), 13. As Stanley Fish has concluded, “the reader cannot possibly . . . ignore the problem (the eighteenth-century commentators were already debating it) once the Ovidian allusion is recognized. The presence of Narcissus, even at a remove, is a puzzle,” 218-19. Nevertheless, the ambiguity inherent in the expression “vain desire” (IV.466) is clearly calculated, for had Milton wished to portray Eve as vain to the point of being narcissistic, he could have made use of the tradition, popularized by Peter Comestor, that for the temptation Satan chose *quoddam genus serpentis* . . . *virgineum vultum habens, quia similia similibus applaudunt* (“a certain kind of serpent . . . which had the countenance of a virgin, because like favours like”) as cited by Cheung (note 5, 212).

³⁴ See Chapters 4 and 6 for further discussion of the way Satan puts to use the knowledge he gains by overhearing Eve's conversation with Adam.

³⁵ Interestingly, neither Golding nor Sandys pick up on this hard/soft dichotomy in their translations of the lines from Ovid, but it becomes an important thematic motif in Milton's account (see Chapter 7).

³⁶ Wendy Pferrer notes how: "Medieval commentators associated various qualities with the narcissus as flower which reiterate this idea of lifelessness, for the narcissus is described as beautiful, yet useless, a flower which is sterile and withers after a short time, exuding a soporific or poisonous perfume" (18).

³⁷ See DuRocher, 86-87.

³⁸ It seems not without significance that Milton uses here the very same expression that Sandys had adopted to contrast the waters in the open sea with that confined by river banks, *in mare perveniunt partim campoque recepta / liberioris aquae pro ripis litora pulsant* (*Met.* I.41-42): "When in that liquid Plaine, with freer wave, / The foamie Cliffes, in stead of Banks, they lave."

³⁹ A number of critics have drawn attention to the strategic deployment of a network of comparisons and contrasts between the two accounts, including: Maureen Quilligan, 227-28; Froula (1983), 330-33; Cheung, 201-2; Martin, 67-74.

⁴⁰ This is in pointed contrast to Marvell's conception of Paradise where, "Two paradises 'twere in one, / To live in paradise alone" (*The Garden*, 51-52), James W. Stone has argued that: "In the world of Milton's *Paradise Lost* there exists an implicit imbalance between the sexes, in that man suffers a wrenching sense of differential lack, whereas woman is apparently more self-sufficient and independent of the other sex" (33). See too, Lee Morrissey, especially 332.

⁴¹ Although Adam's Heavenly Maker protests that He is "alone / From all Eternitie, for none I know / Second to me or like, equal much less" (VIII.405-7), this is not the whole truth; it sidesteps his relationship with the Son: the Son is the "radiant image" of the Father and His "sole complacence" (III.63, 276). Grossman has made an interesting observation regarding the correlative relationship between Eve as the image of Adam, and the Son as the image of the Father. While the Son is "positioned toward the Father as Eve is toward Adam," he concedes that, "There is, however, a difference. Where the 'I' of Eve becomes autonomous once outside the eye of Adam (in the separation scene for example), the Son always perfectly expresses the 'I' of the Father, whose eye cannot be evaded" (153).

⁴² See, for instance, Grossman, 151; James, 134; Champagne, 53; Zimmerman, 250, and notably, Knoespel, (1989), 89-95.

⁴³ Compare Milton's own gloss of the scriptural phrase "help meet" (Gen. II.18): the creation of woman supplies Adam with "*another self, a second self, a very self it self*" (*Tetrachordon*, Col. 4.90).

⁴⁴ In *Tetrachordon*, where Milton is disposing of the "crabbed opinion" that "manly friendship" would have been preferable company for Adam, he had, with Ovidian ingenuity, drawn out the paradoxical interplay of sameness and difference in the sexes in his conclusion that "the different sexe in most resembling unlikenes, and most unlike resemblance cannot but please best and be pleas'd in the aptitude of that variety" (Col. 4.86). It is not without significance that the renewal of life after the flood is seen to derive from a union of contraries (*discors concordia fetibus apta est*, *Met.* I.433), while the fruitlessness of sameness is elaborated at length in the story of Iphis' homosexual love for Ianthe (*Met.* IX.718-34).

⁴⁵ Karen Edwards argues, “Adam’s account implies that Eve” is an “‘idealized and objectified’ image . . . from the outset” (240).

⁴⁶ In *The Defence of Poesy*, Sidney uses this expression to denote the original conception in the artist’s mind to which he attempts to give expression in his work (212).

⁴⁷ The intriguing possibility that woman is the culmination of creation was not without precedent. See Chapter 4 where this is discussed in greater detail.

⁴⁸ The significance to be attached to Eve’s beauty is explored more fully in Chapter 4.

⁴⁹ Of course, Adam experiences a jarring reminder of Eve’s inconvenient autonomy in the gardening debate when she fails to yield at his bidding (see Chapter 5).

⁵⁰ This is in pointed contrast to the lesson preached by Donne at the wedding of Sir Francis Nethersole, where he enjoined upon the bride the traditional Pauline ideal of wifely behaviour, “*be content to learn in silence with all subjection*,” “Sermon 17: Preached on Genesis 2:18”. As Michael Schoenfeldt has remarked, “The speech of Adam and Eve, like their work in the garden, is surprisingly egalitarian, especially when one considers the premium placed on feminine silence by Milton’s culture” (324); this said, Eve’s readiness to converse with the Satanic serpent seems designed to draw a more ambivalent response from the reader (see Chapter 6, note 30).

⁵¹ See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of the implications of this tendency.

⁵² The *Narrationes* form the earliest known commentary on the *Metamorphoses*. In the Renaissance they were incorrectly attributed to Lactantius, and were incorporated into the major editions of the *Metamorphoses*, such as that of Regius, as prose arguments that preface the actual text of the fable. The quotation here is taken from the fifth in a series of nine glosses devoted to Book III. As Knoespel maintains, the prose gloss “controls the meaning emerging from the text,” functioning “as a filter

separating valuable detail from matter judged extraneous or potentially misleading” (1985), 26.

⁵³ Martindale (1985) 313, where he also draws attention to the influential ‘Platonizing’ moralization of the myth by “Ficino in his commentary on Plato’s *Symposium* (VI.xvii). Narcissus here is the antitype of the Platonic lover: Diotima teaches Socrates to avoid death by leading him from body to soul and thence upwards to God (‘quam utique mortem ut Socrates devitaret, Diotima ipsum a corpore ad animum, ab hoc in angelum, ab eo reduxit in deum’).” See Chapter 4 for further discussion of the way Milton draws upon the philosophical mythology of Neoplatonic thought.

⁵⁴ William Kerrigan argues that: “Her entrancement with her form is transferred, as it were, to Adam, lifting the figure reflected in the mirror of narcissism into the higher dialectic of mutual love,” but he also goes on to acknowledge how in *Paradise Lost*, “the authority of its temptation scene depends on the entanglement, in the tempted, of narcissism and mutual love” (70).

⁵⁵ Adam’s decision to risk dying with Eve rather than living in Paradise without her is considered in greater depth in Chapter 6.

⁵⁶ As Knoespel has wisely observed: “The fable . . . evokes more meaning than any single meaning supplied from the outside” (1989), 79.

⁵⁷ It is Satan rather than Eve who becomes paradigmatic of the hopelessly enclosed self; see Shullenberger (1993).